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Viet Document Urged Atom 'Demonstration'

By Don Oberdorfer
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High-ranking U.S. military officials twice recommended a "demonstration" drop of atomic weapons in Indochina, in late 1964 and early 1965, according to documents published yesterday by the conservative magazine National Review.

The documents were among 14 pages of supposedly "top secret" official papers printed by the magazine to "thrust into an appropriate context" the earlier revelations of Pentagon papers by The New York Times, The Washington Post and other newspapers. The magazine, which is edited by William F. Buckley Jr., said the new documents were supplied by an informant who believed The Times account conveyed a "distorted impression" of what happened in Vietnam.

The National Review documents do not appear to be among the Pentagon papers reported by The Times and The Post. The National Review documents tend to show—like some of the papers revealed earlier—that one group of high officials argued in the mid-1960s that the Vietnam war could be won by sudden, massive escalation but could not be won by military "gradualism."

According to the papers published by the National Review, Air Force and Central Intelligence Agency members of an interdepartmental committee in October 1964 recommended a "sharp knock" or "quantum escalation" strategy, including such measures as the closing of Haiphong and Sihanoukville harbors, rapid destruction of all North Vietnamese thermal power installations and destruction of rail lines linking China and North Vietnam.

These members also recommended destruction of the Red River dikes in North Vietnam, neutralization of Hainan Island off the Vietnamese coast and "demonstration drop of nuclear device . . . followed by use of nuclear bombs and devices which are initially suitable, if GVN [Government of North Vietnam] does not re-

In connection with the nuclear "demonstration," the document cited a May 26, 1964, recommendation from Adm. Arthur W. Radford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to Secretary of Defense Charles E. Wilson. That recommendation, which was contained in the Pentagon secret history and published by The New York Times, advocated "employing atomic weapons, whenever advantageous" if the Chinese Communists intervene in Indochina.

The October 1964 document published by the National Review argued that the United States could prevent a Communist takeover in Vietnam only by adoption of massive escalation. The document concluded that "if, for whatever reason, it is decided to be paramourly undesirable to adopt such a strategy—and therefore as a consequence impossible to achieve our objective—the U.S. should renounce its commitment in Southeast Asia, and withdraw as rapidly as is physically possible."

The National Review said the Air Force-CIA statement was a "minority" report that went further than the approved text of the interdepartmental study. The magazine said it was not clear whether this minority statement was ever placed before the National Security Council or President Johnson.

Cable to Joint Chiefs

Another document published by the National Review was said to be a February 12, 1965, cable to the Joint Chiefs of Staff from Adm. U.S. Grant Sharp, then Commander in Chief of U.S. forces in the Pacific (abbreviated CINCPAC). The cable said Sharp concurred in the "general approach" of "Annex November" of Opplan (Operations Plan) 65-34K. Sharp added that he did not concur in the "postdrop airborne monitoring requirements" for the plan because additional facilities were needed. Sharp said he did not concur in the "predicted fallout patterns, if any."

"CINCPAC [Sharp] concurs that increased risk of tensions with Chicom (Chinese Communists) and USSR will result from successful completion of demonstration drop. However, if this is primary criterion for determining scope and nature of military operations in SE Asia, it is clear to me that withdrawal is preferred course of action," the cable said.

The document added that "total impact of a successful high altitude drop off Haiphong harbor on DRV [Democratic Republic of Vietnam—North Vietnam] leadership impossible to estimate directly. However, CINCPAC finds it difficult to visualize any other course of action for us in present conflict which would be more likely to (a) bring DRV to conference table (b) enable us to settle conflict on favorable terms for ourselves and GVN [Government of Vietnam—South Vietnam] and (c) save lives of American fighting men."

Another National Review document dated Feb. 10, 1965—two days before the date of the Sharp cable—indicates that Secretary of State Dean Rusk was strongly opposed to the use of nuclear weapons in Vietnam. This paper is said to be the text of a handwritten note by Rusk summarizing the results of a high-level departmental meeting to discuss a possible U.S. declaration of war.

According to the Rusk notes, a declaration of war by the United States "conjures up prospect of use of atomic weapons which we do not want even to suggest."

'Precedent of Korea'

Among the other reasons for opposing a declaration of war, the Rusk notes show, were the "precedent of Korea as an undeclared war," the prior commitment on many occasions of U.S. troops by presidential order and the fact that it was uncertain whom the United States should declare war against.

The notes said the Tonkin Gulf Resolution of August 1964 was a sufficient authority for "a short term effort"—and estimated that "sharp actions" proposed by the Joint Chief of Staff would make possible the conclusion of overt U.S. military operations. "After that, only mopping up operations," the note said.

Other documents published by the National Review include:

• A June 1963 paper by Prof. Daniel Boorstin (now director of the Smithsonian National Museum of History and Technology) reporting to President Kennedy that a committee of historians and cultural anthropologists concludes the American public does not tend to support "protracted war."

• A December 1963 report attributed to the head of the "Division of Psychological Assessment, CIA" arguing that a protracted war would have "disastrous results" in Vietnam and divide the American public—but that a one-to-two-year war would not.

• June 1964 assessments attributed to the CIA reporting that the Soviet Union would not be likely to take nuclear action in Vietnam and estimating that China would intervene directly in the war only if North Vietnam was "on the point of total defeat."

• The December 1964 report of "an eminent private citizen," whom the National Review suggests may have been Dean Acheson, recommending that the United States should not involve its forces in overt fighting in Vietnam unless it is willing to discontinue the existing "policy of accommodation" with the Soviet Union.

In an editorial, the National Review said it was publishing only fragments of the material made available to it and might publish more later. The magazine said it had established to its satisfaction that the documents being printed do not damage U.S. national security and in fact "advance the national interest."

There was no comment on the National Review papers from the Defense Department or the Justice Department.

Acheson, Dean

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